

REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE

You are your one and only original critic.

**Some Principles for Television, the 4th Genre;
for Censorship; for TV Politics;
and for the Revolution of Yourself**

The dark ages ended twice as long ago as most of you are old. Vladimir Zworykin and Philo Farnsworth, the fathers of television, said *Let There Be TV* and there was TV. The world's age-old Age of Darkness ended when the first TV camera first beamed light into the first cathode receiver in the 1930s. Soon America had more to do than sit bored in brightly lighted living rooms knitting huge slipcovers for the Empire State Building. Suddenly there was TV and the people found it good.

TV, more than any other technology, has revolutionized our American heads. Nothing is anymore the same. As soon as the gas-wheel and the jet-wing extended our foot, we escaped our age-old imprisonment in time and geography. The telephone extended our ears and our voices. The TV camera externalized our sight. No longer are we imprisoned by the physics of how far we can hear, of how loud we can shout, or of how limited is our horizon.

Technology has amplified us. And freed us. TV technology especially has broken our isolation. But many people kick

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and scream and resist the 20th century. They resent losing the security of being left nicely alone on a remote farm or in an urban apartment. The concept of Man in Society, they blubber, is much more complicated and frightening than the concept of Man Alone. The Serpent brought trouble to Adam and Eve alone in Paradise. They ate themselves out of house and home, but the apple gave the two of them knowledge of good and evil. It gave them critical ability. Is TV the Eve who dares put us on the moon, into Asian jungles, campus disorders, and ghetto squalor?

Without TV, people could live comfortably isolated and unconcerned on Iowa farms, in Indiana villages, and in air-conditioned Chicago townhouses. The fact is, the Technological Revolution, far more than the Industrial Revolution, has forced us into contact with each other and each other's ideas and problems. TV has proved John Donne's and Thomas Merton's brother-keeping axiom: No man is an island.

Old ideas of time and space are dead, but old myths give rise to new. Time-honored styles of American living modulate into new fads and fashions. America celebrates, for better or for worse, the Now-ness of a Throw-Away Culture. Pity the citizens who can't or won't accept change as positive good.

Henry David Thoreau, America's first hip intellectual, said, in *Walden*, that: "Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things.... We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate."

Technology can be no end in itself. What's the use of building television circuitry that webs the Earth's continents even up to the Moon, if television has nothing to say to the Earth and to the Moon? If, however, television does indeed find something to say to the Earth and the Moon

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and if you can't decipher it, what's the use of you watching your television?

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This is *Television Today*, the revolutionary electric TV coloring-book magazette.

But no more than you accept television, newspapers, or teachers as absolute truth can you accept this issue of *Today* about television as true. You are, in fact, your one and only original critic. You have to sift your sources. You won't like some of this issue and you don't have to accept any of it. What would you do if I sang out of tune? The fact of the matter is: this magazine issue, and these intellectual issues, are calculated to make you think, to make you more critical.

And criticism is no negative trip. Being critical is a positive act. Being critical is necessary if your head is to survive the onslaught of hemi-demi-semi truths and untruths that bang at your senses from television, radio, movies, books, periodicals, and other people. Being critical puts you on top. Criticism puts you in control. The critic exercises his own well-informed judgment. The responsibility is big; but the responsibility is no drag. Criticism is cross-examining *for yourself* the who, what, when, where, why, and how of a person, statement, art object, or situation.

Put The Beatles' "Revolution No. 9" on your record player. The Fab 4 sing carefully about the difference between revolution and evolution, about changing the world without destruction.

Revolution is change. Evolution is change. Notice how scientists constantly turn to animals for explanations of man's behavior? Once you accept evolution on a biological level (even if only as a theory where God intervened at a soul-point in time), you have to accept evolution on other

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levels as well: psychological evolution, social evolution, moral evolution. In the ninth century the Catholic Church owned slaves. Moral evolution occurred and the Church led Christianity's change to abolition. After World War II, Americans turned to the car as never before. Our society became mobile. This social evolution created our drive-in culture: restaurants; theatres; and, in California, drive-in mortuaries.

New England poet Robert Frost was a farmer as well as a poet and critic. He once said that we learn from our hands to our head. He meant he could not have written the poetic line "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" if he had not built stone-pile walls with his own raw hands, only to see the bitter New England winters work the rocks down. Frost meant literal hands make metaphorical heads.

A literal person calculates the distance and increasing velocity of a falling stone. A metaphorical person understands a rock whose roll reminds him of truths and insights into the human condition of life, love, and death. Frost meant you can't stop with arithmetic, which makes one equal a literal one. A man of critical insight understands how one appearance can signal two, three, or four hidden realities. Like getting a second and dirty meaning out of a first-level innocent joke.

Literal people view Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* as a great ABC *Wide World of Sports* story about a fisherman whose oversized catch is attacked by sharks. Metaphorical people, who perceive the reality behind the fundamental appearance, see the literalist's one-to-one denotation that Hemingway's is a simple fish story; but they also see the metaphor, the connotation of one-to-two or one-to-three levels of reality—perhaps the story of the Old Man's catch is a universal statement about the human condition.

How many literal viewers watched Hemingway's story on TV (or read the book) and missed the metaphor: if you

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go for the big catch, chances are the sharks of life will try to tear you to shreds before you can bring it on home. Yet the try for Big Things, even failed Big Things, can be its own reward.

To get behind the literal level of meaning is not to reduce enjoyment of your TV watching. You actually increase it by giving it depth. 3-D TV is here. It's your mind that gives the flat screen its third dimension. Commercials, news, series, and specials all require your criticism. And your critical thinking, open-ended to new attitudes and new facts, can bring the Big Things home to the evolving and the new—if you have the Old Man's courage not to hide in your farm-and-townhouse isolation.

But, just because somebody has studied a lot or viewed every edition of CBS *Special Reports* doesn't mean he's developed his critical faculty. Listen to novelist Carson McCullers on her Army hero Captain Penderton:

When he was a young lieutenant and a bachelor he had had much opportunity to read [and watch television].... His head was filled with statistics and information of scholarly exactitude. For instance, he could describe in detail the curious digestive apparatus of a lobster or the life history of a Trilobite. He spoke and wrote three languages gracefully. He knew something of astronomy and had read much poetry. [Here comes McCullers' good part!] But in spite of his knowledge of many *separate facts*, the Captain *never* in his life had *had an idea in his head*. For the formation of an idea involves the *fusion of two or more known facts*. And this the Captain had not the *courage* to do. (Italics added)

McCullers' novel is called *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. Think about it. TV—even in CBS' network symbol—is

often termed a huge Eye. The screen reflects the room your television set sits in. It reflects the factual world the TV cameras transmit to it. And it reflects the attitudes of the popular commercial culture that sponsors it. Whether that TV Eye is “golden” or not depends not as much on the local and network programmers as it does on you the critical viewers who watch it.

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Television is the New World Literature, the fourth genre. The traditional genres of fiction, poetry, and drama pale by comparison to the impact of the TV omnibus. A classroom which teaches you only how to interpret stories and poetry is a classroom whose relevance was outdated when the last one-room schoolhouse folded its potbellied stove and its Port-O-San.

By the time the current “Imagination” reaches kindergarten each child has spent one-fourth to one-half of his waking hours in front of the TV screen. By the time these children graduate from high school each one will have watched 15,000 hours of television. That is nearly 2,000 hours more time, as Senator Pastore points out, than he has spent in school. Only sleeping—certainly not reading or play-going—has required more time than his TV watching. Television has, in a sense, become the New Religion. It provides new icons, new totems, and new prophets for our society wandering in the desert of a cultural revolution.

In the womb-incubators of our warm TV sets, new myths proper to our times are shaped and formed. TV, in fact, has become the American medium equivalent to the process of canonization in the Catholic Church. No Broadway play, no novel, no Hollywood movie really makes it until the networks announce its sainting as a primetime series. Just so were Neil Simon’s plays *The Odd Couple* and

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Barefoot in the Park verified; just so was Grace Metalious' novel *Peyton Place* or William Faulkner's novel *The Long Hot Summer* realized; just so does a premiere on *Monday Night at the Movies* make real to a mass audience films that formerly played only to the patrons of limited seating in dark movie palaces.

Haskell Wexler's film about Chicago during Mayor Daley's 1968 Democratic Convention was called *Medium Cool*. The medium which moviemaker Wexler referred to was TV. He called it *cool* because TV, more than any other art form, can do everything to everybody. TV is *the* influential medium for man in a mass culture. So powerful is TV as informer and persuader that it sometimes finds itself cut down for its very virtues. Why is TV banned from our American courtrooms? Would our society be better for watching late night videotapes (to keep children from exposure) of the trial of the Chicago Seven? Of Charles Manson? Of Lieutenant Calley? Is it a moot question why TV was daily hassled out of the Chicago Democratic convention? Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in the Yippie street chant, "The whole world is watching." In free-speech and free-press America can there be people who wish to turn off the TV cameras? Who wish not to show us the agony of Cesar Chavez? Who wish to devolve us back into the Dark Ages where injustice and information were kept from the unwatching eyes of the world?

Whether or not you agree with the media freaks—hippies, yippies, or dippies—the point is that TV in the summer of 1968 made Chicago everybody's neighborhood. Since TV was let be, the whole world has lived on the same block. But should TV try to create us in its own image and likeness? Are we to believe, to buy, and to wear whatsoever TV commands?

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If we are to be more than a nation of sheep, we must be creatively critical of the dictates TV hands us. In the balance between *facts* and *attitudes*, TV more than any other contemporary medium tells us the facts we need to know about Washington D.C., Vietnam, pollution, and Jackie's Rich Greek. Unless we are as literally factual as Captain Penderton hiding out in his study, we ourselves have got to get together our *idea-attitudes* toward those simple separate *facts* that TV likes to sock to us.

Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew added Overton Taylor, emeritus professor at Harvard, and S.I. Hayakawa to his discussion of TV as attitude-maker. Agnew's Taylor says that television commercials have filled the minds of the young

with pictures of fatuous, silly, blithely unconcerned well-to-do Americans as consumers, interested only in acquiring and enjoying trivial luxuries and pleasures, and oblivious to all the serious troubles of most people of their country and the world.

Agnew's Hayakawa declares:

The world makes all sorts of demands the television set never told you about, such as study, patience, hard work, and a long apprenticeship in a trade or profession before you may enjoy what the world has to offer.

Agnew himself wrote in *TV Guide*:

How much of the terrible impatience of so many young people—evident in the virulence of their protests—can be traced to the disparity between the real world and that Epicurean world inside the television set where the proper combination of pills and cars and cigarettes and deodorants can bring relief

from suffering and instant gratification of all their material wants and desires?

Henry Steele Commager, quoted by Agnew, wrote:

On the whole the contribution of this new and potentially great medium of television to education... is meager, and is more than counterbalanced by its contributions to noneducation and to the narrowing of intellectual horizons. Television...neither transmits the knowledge of the past to the next generation, nor contributes to professional training, nor does it expand the boundaries of knowledge.

Such a collage of attitudes about attitudes indicates that the American Establishment is having no love affair with Lady Television. It can't abide her trend-setting changes. Agnew has asked, "How much disorder, how many of these illegal demonstrations which pockmark the country would ever take place if the ever-present television camera were not there?"

Militantly anti-establishment, Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman views TV as the prime instrument of radicalization, the prime instrument of revolutionary attitudes.

(Are Mr. Agnew and Mr. Hoffman in that much agreement after all?)

Another of the Chicago Seven said openly: "Our real goal has been to get this trial on television." Hoffman himself has repeated time and again the importance of TV as an educative medium: "We no longer need the schools. What we need to do is to give everybody a TV set. You can learn everything you need to know from TV."

With such divergent views, you are left to your own critical devices.

Television, the Ultimate American Invention, is like America: neither as bad nor as good as either extreme would

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name it. Nicholas Johnson, FCC Commissioner, has said of America: "This country is a great experiment. For close to 200 years we have been testing whether it is possible for an educated and informed people to govern themselves."

Those right-wing and left-wing Americans who both claim to have the absolute (and opposite) answers for America seem to forget our Experimental Status. Absolute dictates are so far from the real American temper that we are the only nation in the world whose National Anthem begins and ends with a question.

Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay "The American Scholar" defined the dubious role of the All-American Critic in this way: The intellectual is simply Man Thinking.

By Emerson's definition you are the American intellectuals as you criticize the role TV plays in the American experiment. Your sheer attendance at an institution of higher learning gives objective verification that if you are not the intellectuals of America, no one is.

People Thinking ought to be able to judge for themselves. Yet NBC President Julian Goodman frankly admits that American television, because it is the informer, "is now under threat of restriction and control." CBS President Frank Stanton states that "attempts are being made to block us." ABC News Chief Elmer Lower predicts that television may "face the prospect of some form of censorship."

NBC, CBS, and ABC, more impactful than the two wire services of the Associated Press and the United Press International, inform America of what there is to know. Thomas Jefferson, aware of England's tyrannical censorship, said, "The way to prevent error is to give the people full information of their affairs." Tom must be revolving in his grave, for recently:

- Censors have cut actor Robert Montgomery off the NBC *Tonight Show* when he mentioned a certain CBS station under FCC investigation.

- Unnamed powers-that-be have caused the networks to tie up Truman Capote's documentary special *Death Row: USA*, so that not even National Educational Television (NET) can show the shocking brutalities Capote has unearthed in the American Way of Capital Punishment. A Supreme Court ruling seems in the offing.

- Censors have scissored Joan Baez' anti-draft views from the CBS *Smothers Brothers*. Eventually the whole award-winning *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* was silenced.

- Authorities, like the fabled "Priscilla Goodbody" of NBC, have not permitted Ralph Nader or Christine Jorgensen on any NBC talk shows. Crusader Nader, author of the anti-Detroit book *Unsafe at Any Speed*, is a consumer-protector who often attacks products that happen to be the networks' major accounts. (Auto advertising runs about four-hundred million dollars annually.) Miss Jorgensen some years ago sustained transsexual surgery. The censors, despite best-selling books, popular movies, and daily newspaper accounts, judge the TV audience too immature to deal with the subject.

- NBC—perhaps protecting its Christian sponsors and viewers—denied Johnny Carson permission to feature a seance on his Halloween *Tonight Show*, although Witchcraft Churches are now protected under the freedom-of-religion clause of the United States Constitution.

- Censors have ordered cuts in most recent Hollywood films to make them suitable for TV. *Secret Ceremony*, a terrible flop starring Elizabeth Taylor and Mia Farrow, not only

had to be cut, but certain scenes left out of the original theater print had to be edited back into the TV print. Whoever these censors are, adding and subtracting footage, they obviously want everything their way with little discrimination left up to the individual viewer.

Local stations, disagreeing with their parent network, often announce that “We reserve the right to delay network programming for showing at a more convenient time.” The “convenient time” for showing *Bill Cosby* and *Julia* on many Southern TV stations never comes—for obvious reasons. More absurdly, at least one TV station (WMAA-TV) in Jackson, Mississippi—where education has long been so wretched it needs all the help it can get—refuses to air *Sesame Street* because of the integrated cast. Surely that’s the censor cutting off his racist nose to spite his children’s minds.

If you doubt this subtle suasion of vested interests, note well the FCC’s expose that NBC anchorman Chet Huntley was in his newscasts “editorializing *against* the Wholesome Meat Act at a time when he and his business partners were heavy investors in the cattle and meat business.”

Don’t think it wasn’t a major triumph against moneyed censorship when the Supreme Court forced TV to run the American Cancer Society’s cautions against cigarette smoking. The networks resisted because the Cancer Crusade led—as they suspected it would—to the banning of all cigarette commercials, in order to protect the impressionable young. Consider that in 1970 the tobacco companies sold nine billion dollars worth of cigarettes, and provided TV with its largest single source of advertising revenue.

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Okay. TV is a mind-bender. So whom do you trust? The censors? The professional critics hired by *Life*, *Look*, and *TV*

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Guide? The businessmen? Yourself? The FCC's Nicholas Johnson (in *TV Guide*) argues for open TV in a free society:

I would far rather leave the heady responsibility for the inventory in America's "marketplace of ideas" to talented and uncensored *individuals*—creative writers, performers and journalists from all sections of this great country—than to the *committees* of frightened financiers in New York City. Wouldn't you? I think so.

Johnson does not mean that children should not be protected from certain scenes and subjects. They should. But that protection ought to be descriptive censorship, not prescriptive.

Descriptive censorship is advisory. It reviews taped programs and films, recommending the level of audience suitability. Parents for their children, or individuals for themselves, can then decide to view or not to view. The important point is that the choice remains with the informed and free individual.

Prescriptive censorship, on the other hand, autocratically announces that no one may watch a show. The individual viewer has no choice since the network and/or its affiliate station snatches free choice from his hands and either edits or never airs the program. Our American Motion Picture Ratings (GP, M, R, X) are advisably descriptive. Hitler's bookburning censorship was prescriptive.

Someone once predicted that we will one day have Fascism in America, but we will call it Americanism. When people start managing our news, when people start prescriptive censorship, we are halfway there. If the right-or-left-wing rumblings of this poisoned kind of Americanism are among us, they will be heard first over TV. It will be the insatiable eye and ear of the TV camera that will first catch

it and experience it for what it is. Free TV is the stand where free America lives or dies. TV is the thermometer of our times. Like Chicken Man, it's everywhere. To find out how fevered we are as a nation, turn on the TV and tune in the popular temperature.

Even if political suppression of TV is not this much of a radical danger, then consider the basis of the two alternatives of censorship.

Prescriptive censorship is insulting. It is predicated on the assumption that people are essentially stupid and uncritical. It would dismiss democracy as the glorification of the lowest common denominator. Descriptive censorship, however, is really no censorship at all, predicating itself on the critical thinking and awareness of the intelligent viewer. It terms democracy a climate where freedom of responsible choice is available to the informed mind.

A sub-classification of descriptive censorship is the Natural Censorship of the Hour in Primetime. This means that adult programming, unsuitable for children, can be telecast after ten p.m. Presumably, impressionable youngsters are bedded down by that hour. Why, indeed, should our entire evening programming be censored to the twelve-year-old level when the twelve-year-olds are not watching? Must TV, like so much else in American culture, be child-oriented rather than adult-oriented? Once the nation accepts the ten p.m. to midnight slot as an adult viewing time, TV can do away with much of the nonsense that TV's chief censor, Stockton Helffrich, the director of the National Association of Broadcasters Code Authority, tries to pull off at 485 Madison Avenue, New York. (And if *you* don't like what he tries to do, write him about it.)

A nation hardly praiseworthy for its censorship or its segregation, South Africa—as very few Americans realize—has no television at all. The openly racist South African government fears the educative power of TV on the Blacks who

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are kept in strict confinement and curfew. South Africa, obviously, has not abolished slavery. In order to keep their Black citizens “in their place,” the apartheid South African government has prescriptively censored the entire medium of television from their country. Currently, for their 1971 elections, the liberal Opposition Party is running on a platform promoting television as an informative medium for all South Afrikaners, White and Black.

Of the two censorships, prescriptive and descriptive, it's not too hard to guess which the thinking American would jealously prefer.

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TV thrives on dramatic impact. Vice-President Agnew blames the television camera for young America's turn from political indifference to active involvement. He says:

“Action” holds a viewing audience. Thus, there is competition among the network newsmen to pack “action” into their broadcasts. If one point of view is presented, a conscious effort is made to find its opposite and present a new controversy to the public. This raises the question: how much overemphasized controversy and contrived action can be presented night after night to the American people before reality is clouded...?

Is this a very high opinion of the critical ability of the average middle-American? Do audiences swallow tele-dramatics as uncritically as the Vice-President suggests when he says that young people

enjoy confrontation because they were brought up on television instead of books. They're conditioned to action and emotion, not words. It is a perfectly

natural, everyday thing. They see action, violence, confrontation on television and they are naturally more conditioned to action than logic. The danger is that they tend to become caught up in the event....

Can our controversial Vice-President really mean what he's saying? The young "Imageration," admittedly fascinated by the non-verbal psychedelia of sound and lightshows, has not read five hundred books to match the five hundred movies they've viewed for fun by high-school graduation. But does this mean that our main source of information should be prescribed? Does this mean that we should be denied the vision of television which extends us into alternative worlds and springs us out of the ghettos of our minds? What would Thomas Jefferson say? Does Mr. Agnew really mean such a put-down of young Americans who are so socially aware and politically active that the voting age is just now being lowered to eighteen to match the drafting age? Can you accept the Vice-President any less critically than you accept Walter Cronkite or this very issue of *Today*?

At one time in American political history, time and geography tyrannized over our political system. Technology has removed that twin tyranny, but the antiquated political system remains. It no longer takes the presidential-election count from either Maine or Texas a full week to make it to the nation's capitol. TV-telephone-computer complexes can tabulate instantly in the District of Columbia how John Brown voted in Sebastopol, California. Technology has removed the tyranny, but the electoral college (designed by our Founding Fathers to counteract it) remains. The electoral college is a debate in itself. Whether it is a safeguard to the American system or not, from a sheer representational point of view of one vote per customer, the electoral college is now a pre-technological dinosaur. Contemplate this as your critical mind considers next year's presidential election.

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Like it or not these days, we have Election by Television. The rich, who can afford the TV time, and the talented (especially former actors), who know how to relax into the medium, have in recent elections proven themselves winners. Sure, the ordinary guy can still run for high offices; but gone are the days when he could win. During the 1968 campaigns, candidates spent sixty million dollars on TV and radio advertising. This is high finance. No wonder that on local, state, and federal levels it is the wealthy who tend to be the candidates for offices of governor, senator, congressman, and president.

Wait! As of last summer, hope looms large for the candidate who was born in a log cabin and still lives there. Congress in 1970 passed a bill to effect a basic control of the political uses of television.

To even matters out between the Have and the Have-Not Candidates, Congress has ruled that each campaigner's budget will be limited to seven cents per voter in the last election. If ten people voted in last season's senatorial race, this season's candidate for senator can spend seventy cents.

Actually, seventy-three million people voted for the president in 1968. This limits the 1972 broadcast budget to 5.1 million dollars per party. Compare this to Humphrey's 7.1 million, and Nixon's 12.6 million in 1968. For campaigners in states with highly inflated campaign budgets like New York, 1972 will be a cheaper year. At the going rate of seven cents, the maximum allowed in 1972 in New York can total only ten to twenty percent of the total that New York campaigners blew on broadcasting in 1968. In addition, stations must give the lowest possible rates to all candidates, cutting last season's campaign fees from thirty-five to fifty percent.

Heavy stuff, all this.

But if this issue of *Today* doesn't confront the same world that TV has led you to live in, then this issue has not reached you where you live.

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If it doesn't do that, then it can never reveal to you the worlds of life and love and activity behind and beyond the teleworld you know. If, after you've read it all and have subjected it to discussion and criticism, it still does nothing for you, then trash it under a landslide of not-so-soft psychedelia.

Gather critical acumen where ye may. It's not singing out of tune to say the intelligent are going to inherit the Earth. There is going to be no Street Revolution. At least none that will do any good. Like "April Come She Will," so will the soft but effective Abstract Revolution. Gather those changes. Take them with you into the existing systems. And, with well-aimed critical thinking, go out and revolutionize and change the institutions—from the inside out.